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EARLY REVOLUTIONARY LETTERS OF PETER STRETCH, A PHILADELPHIA WHIG MERCHANT.

BY FRANCIS BAZLEY LEE,
Trenton, N. J.

In the docket book of Peter Stretch, some time merchant in Philadelphia during the opening of the Revolutionary War and at its close a Justice of the Peace in Burlington County, New Jersey, are to be found copies of a series of letters written to merchants in London and the West Indies. From these hitherto unpublished copies the following chronologically arranged extracts are presented, indicative not only of trade conditions in Philadelphia but of the strong personal sentiments of a Whig merchant.

Peter Stretch was a son of Thomas Stretch, first governor of the "Colony in Schuylkill," and his wife Mary Ann Robbins. Peter Stretch married in 1770 his kinswoman Sarah Howell, daughter of Samuel Howell, an eminent Philadelphia merchant. Early in 1776 and in 1778 Peter Stretch was directed by the Continental Congress to be a signer of bills of credit, and served as a member of one of Philadelphia's Whig light infantry companies. He was an object of Tory vengeance, his storehouse in Bordentown having been looted shortly before the battle of Monmouth. He found revenge in being one of those selected to bring Tories to justice, after Sir Henry Clinton's evacuation of Philadelphia in the early summer of 1778. The original letter-copy book is in the possession of a descendant living in Vincentown, Burlington Co., New Jersey.

FORESHADOWING REBELLION.

"June 24, 1774 (* * * * * *), As we are likely to have a Nonimportation agreement to Oppose the Ministerial Strides towards raising a revenue in America, which never will be Accomplish'd without actual rebellion

of the Collonies, I enclose an Order for Next Spring to be Ship'd as early as you please in the fall—on Board any Vessell—you ship your other friend's Goods for I dare say you will have Orders Similar with mine. Please to ship them as soon as Possible least they be Serv'd as the India Company's tea.

PETER STRETCH.

To Will^{m} Neate Esq^{r} Merch^{t} London.
P. Nancy Cap^{t} Johnston Via Bristol
Coppy P July Packett

A HINT FROM THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS.

"PHILAD^{a} October 21st 1774

WILL^{m} NEATE

SIR

I received your favor of 4th August advising me of the Arrival of the Molly, Cap^{t} Johnston by whom I sent you Willing & Co Draft upon Bristol & there payable instead of this City which would be a Disadvantage to you. I gave as much for it as if it was payable in London & Bills upon London were not to be had at any rate & when Bills are not to be had upon London, those upon Bristol or Liverpool are better than Nothing. You likewise advise me of your intending to Compleat my Order as soon as Possible which will just be the plan for our Congress have hinted to the Dry Goods Mercht^{s} that Goods Arriving here after the 1 Dec^{r} will not be permitted to be landed so that few Spring Goods can be expected. It is expected that the Congress will break up before falconer Sails & indeed I believe they are waiting for the result of that August body for the Owners of M & E are so dilatory in loading her we tho't she woul'd have sail'd a week ago But John head says in about a week hence. in her you will get some more money from me if I have any luck. * * * * * * *

You^{rs} &c

PETER STRETCH.

To WILL^{m} NEATE ESQ
Merch^{t} London
P Brittania Capt Vanhorn."

FOREIGN TRADE AND RECONCILIATION.

"PHILAD^{a} Nov^{r} 4th 1774.

WILLIAM NEATE,

SIR:—

This Order is Accompanied with the proceedings of the American Congress, respecting the Nonimportation of Goods from Great Brittain untill All our American Grievances are redres'd, which when you find accomplish'd please to execute this Order, if you have not Ship'p'd my Order you receiv'd Aug: 6th time enough to be here by Dec 1st.

If our Grieviances are Redres'd in time for our Spring & Summer Goods, please to send the following by the first Vessell that Sails from your port for this viz:— (Here follows a long list of articles suitable for the Philadelphia market.

"Please to endeavour to send the Cloths of the same Quality as Woods sends them to West."

(Another list of goods desired.)

"If the ministry should think proper to Disannul (with the Consent of Parliament) those Acts which Americans think so oppressive at a time when winter and fall Goods are exposed, please to let this be Complied with. (A third list of goods set forth.)

Your humble serv^{t}

PETER STRETCH.

P MARY & ELIZ: CAPT FALCONER."

THE SPIRIT OF AMERICANS.

PHILADELPHIA Nov^{r} 4. 1774.

WILL^{m} NEATE

SIR,

(* * * * *) I send you by Capt^{n} Falconer the printed resolutions of the Congress which will be religiously Observed by the People of America, for altho' there may

be some rascalls that would take the Advantage of the times yet the Vox Populi are the true Spirit of Liberty & that man's property would be destroy'd & perhaps his Life Sacrifiz'd into the Bargain if he Dar'd to Contradict the above Mentioned Resolutions of Congress.

You will find that all Goods imported from G. Brittain & Arriving here after Dec^{r} 1st & before Feb^{y} 1st are either to be stor'd at the risque of the importer or sold at Vendue, the proffitts (if any) Arising, to be sent to Boston to mantain their Poor And All Goods Arriving here after Feb^{y} 1st to be sent back at All events & not be permitted to be landed.

So that you are to govern Yourself Accordingly in the Complying with my Orders, you are not to Ship any Goods to this part of the World, untill all the revenue Laws are totally repeal'd so that if my Spring Order doth not arrive here untill after Dec^{r} 1st, I shall have nothing to do but Collect in my Debts as fast as possible and pay you off in Order to have an Anchor to windward against next importation.

Your humb^{l} Serv^{t}

PETER STRETCH.

"To WILL^{m} NEATE ESQ
Merch^{t} London

P. MARY & ELIZABETH, CAPT FALCONER
Sail^{d} from here Nov^{r} & left the Capes
Coppy with a 2nd Bill P. Lydia Capt^{n} Dean."

WHAT NEW YORK WHIGS DID.

(Probably written from Philadelphia.)

Feby 17. 1775

M^{r} WILLIAM NEATE

GOOD SIR:

(* * * * * *) The Disputes between Great Brittain & America engross the whole Conversation & the Spirit of the people is greatly Irritated by his Majesty's most

Gracious Speech from the throne, however it is my Opinion that the Americans will be Obstinate for even in New York where the Tories Swarm, the people sent off a Ship that Arrived there with Goods from Glascow, the Captn Applied to the Man of War for protection & he put forty hands on Board her to Cover her landing the Goods, but All wou'd not do she was Oblig'd to go to Jamaica with all her Loading. Spring Goods are very Scarce in this place. I expect to sell all mine very much to my Advantage as Goods when in Demand allways Command Cash. I won't sell a Single piece to my Grandfather unless I get the Chink down upon the Nail—

You may expect to hear from me soon & I remain

Your humble Servt

PETER STRETCH.

Enclosed a Bill £120 Stg Drawn by Thos popham on Arnold & Albert Nesbit for Sixty Days

To WILLIAM NEATE ESQr MERCHt London

per Unity Captn, Coppy P. Capt Greenway."

THE NEWS FROM LEXINGTON.

"PHILADa May 1st 1775

WILLm NEATE

GOOD SIR,

I have Just receiv'd your's P. Earl of Dunmore Via N. York enclosing my Account Curt which I have not as yet Attentively Examin'd as we are all in Confusion about a Battle that has been fought between the New England Men and the King's troops wherein the latter were worsted. We are all learning the new Exercise & to a man are determined to Oppose tyranny under any shape or Introduc'd by any power in the World, but the truth you will no doubt see in the public papers (* * * * * *)

* * * (End)

PETER STRETCH."